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A Secret Midnight Ball and a Magic Cloak of Invisibility

The Cinematic Folklore of Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*

Sidney Eve Matrix

He placed himself out of the way in a corner, admiring the grace and beauty of the princesses. Their loveliness was of every kind. With what eagerness they danced!

"The Twelve Dancing Princesses,"
Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm [1812] 1890[1]

This chapter demonstrates the intertexual relationship between Stanley Kubrick's final film, *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), and the international fairy tale known as "The Twelve Dancing Princesses" (ATU 306)—also variously called "The Worn-Out Dancing Shoes" and "The Secret Ball."[2] I argue that approaching *Eyes Wide Shut* through the analytic lens of its borrowings from ATU 306 illuminates the film's central themes of desire, duplicity, and power as classic tropes with a decidedly modern twist. As the case of *Eyes Wide Shut* attests, the age-old story of the disobedient, undomesticated female has considerable cultural elasticity, remaining relevant today as a

1 I use the SurLaLune Web site as a source because of its ready availability as well as its aggregation of different versions across media forms from literature and film, including popular interpretations and variations.

2 In this chapter, I refer to a Portuguese version of ATU 306, "The Shoes That Were Danced to Pieces." It is among dozens of variants included on the Web site SurLaLune Fairy Tales, maintained by Heidi Anne Heiner (http://www.surlalunefairytales.com). Cristina Bacchilega and John Rieder similarly consider gender ideology in fairy tale films in their article in this volume. See also Jennifer Orme's (forthcoming) consideration of Jeanette Winterson's riff on ATU 306 in her novel *Sexing the Cherry*.

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cautionary tale about the perceived threat of female agency and sexuality to the maintenance of patriarchal cultural arrangements and, correspondingly, men's convoluted and misguided attempts to control and dominate women and girls (Bacchilega 1997). A closer look at the details of both *Eyes Wide Shut* and "The Twelve Dancing Princesses" reveals each to be a story about the enigma of female desire, the difficulties of domesticity, and the challenge of marital fidelity for both genders.

Eyes Wide Shut

Bill: Women don't, they basically just don't think like that.
Alice: If you men only knew.

conversation between the Harfords—husband and wife—in *Eyes Wide Shut*

Stanley Kubrick and Frederic Raphael adapted the screenplay of *Eyes Wide Shut* from a novella by Arthur Schnitzler titled *Dream Story (Traumnovelle).* Numerous commentators (including Acevedo-Munoz 2002, Hensher 1999, and Alison 2003) have described the relationship between the 1999 film and its 1926 literary source as a largely faithful, if modernized, adaptation. The narrative of *Eyes Wide Shut* reproduces Schnitzler's story line—although Kubrick added scenes and characters and shifted the setting from 1920s Vienna to 1990s New York. As any artist knows, an adaptation is generally received and reviewed by those aware of its source in light of whether it does justice to, or improves upon, the original. In the case of *Eyes Wide Shut,* most critics in the popular press initially panned the film, criticizing its casting, production design, screenplay, and most (if not all) of the innovations that deviated from *Dream Story*. Subsequently a second wave of reviewers—largely academic—provided in-depth analyses of the strengths and weaknesses of *Eyes Wide Shut* and its engagement with Schnitzler's work, considered the film as part of Kubrick's oeuvre, and assessed it in light of the auteur's death immediately after its completion.

I will reference and integrate some of the insights from both the academic and journalistic assessments as I extend this critical engagement with Kubrick's film in a different direction by considering its intertextual relationship to a different, mainly European story—namely ATU 306. My intention is not to suggest that *Eyes Wide Shut* is a faithful recreation of this tale, nor to claim that the film is straightforward fairy tale cinema,

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but rather to indicate that through the use of a series of parallel motifs, the film accomplishes a compelling modern resuscitation of the tale—however accidentally. In so doing, *Eyes Wide Shut* gains the status of cinematic folklore.[3] By identifying a suite of folkloric motifs linking ATU 306 and *Eyes Wide Shut*, this chapter illustrates the transmediality that is characteristic of cinematic folklore—the tropic borrowings, recombinations, and reaccentuations of traditional material inherent in fairy tale film adaptations (Stam 2004, 25). This analytic approach adds a layer of significance to Kubrick's work, which may contribute to an appreciation of its generic and cultural impact and lasting resonance while, at the same time, developing a more nuanced understanding of the qualities that comprise the genres of cinematic folklore and fairy tale film.

Before going further, I should summarize the general plot of *Eyes Wide Shut,* a film about desire and fantasy but more specifically about the often-unsuccessful, unsatisfying containment of male and female sexuality within the institution of marriage. The hero, Dr. William "Bill" Harford (Tom Cruise), is a lousy husband who has become immune to his wife's beauty and grown complacent about their sexual exclusivity. Blind to Alice's (Nicole Kidman) attractiveness, Bill takes her commitment to monogamy for granted, admitting that he has never felt jealous or worried about losing his wife because they are married and in love and have a child. To convince Bill that women—even wives who love their husbands and children—indeed have complex sexual desires and needs that may put stress on a monogamous marriage, Alice confesses her illicit fantasies about sex with a stranger. Her goal is to enlighten her husband and get his attention when she reveals that in fact just last summer, she flirted with the idea of leaving him to run off with a sexy sailor she glimpsed at a seaside resort while they were on vacation. This storytelling is intended to penetrate her husband's ballooning

3 *Eyes Wide Shut* can also be considered cinematic folklore insofar as it participated in the kind of cultural storytelling typical of paparazzi-fueled tabloids. Reviewers widely suggested that in casting the real-life couple Nicole Kidman and Tom Cruise, Kubrick was banking on some of the massive cultural fascination with A-list actors' lives. In this sense, the furor over sexually explicit and nude scenes in *Eyes Wide Shut* is connected to the audience's voyeuristic desires for a glimpse at the chemistry between these celebrities as the camera penetrates the sanctity of the (albeit fictional) marital bedroom—a desire the trailers for the film invited and exploited. Because it stoked the fires of the celebrity machine, *Eyes Wide Shut* is a popular culture production that functions as contemporary cinematic folklore in its own right. For more on the public's voyeuristic fascination with Kidman and Cruise, see Pocock (2000). For more on the relationship between popular culture and folklore, see Narváez and Laba (1986).

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arrogance and neglectful attitude, and it finds, but overshoots, its mark; Alice's shocking revelation sends Bill into a tailspin crisis of masculinity that lasts three days.

Leaving Alice behind at home—enclosed in the world of domesticity and child care (she is pictured in the kitchen and mothering her daughter in numerous scenes), off goes Bill into the New York night on a journey that is both literal and psychological. For the next two hours, the film follows Bill as he seeks to come to grips with this seemingly new information about the nature of female sexuality and understand and accept what it means for his marriage and his manhood. His pride wounded, Bill contemplates revenge against Alice for her imaginary affair with the naval officer and opts to experiment with sexual infidelities of his own.

Prowling through the dark city streets, Bill fends off the inappropriate amorous advances of two women (first, his client and then, an underage girl); he then dallies with a prostitute and finally bluffs his way into a late-night orgy—from which he barely escapes unharmed. After indulging in some seriously dangerous voyeurism, flirting, fantasizing, and foreplay (though not coitus), coupled with several awkward and agonizing erotic entanglements and guilt-ridden soul searching, a confused and exhausted Bill returns home. The next day he learns that two of the women he sought for intimate (albeit unconsummated) encounters are literally *femmes fatale*: one has overdosed on drugs and died, and the other has contracted HIV.[4] The links among sex, women, and death could not be clearer, and Bill is traumatized, seeking refuge in his imperfect, but comparatively safe, marriage. After confessing his digressions to Alice, their relationship is shaken and transformed but ultimately set on a course of repair. The film concludes with scenes of the couple and their uncomfortable, unsettled, and unconvincingly happy ending—Bill and Alice bound together in suffocating security.

4 Incidentally, as Andrews (2006, 64) observes, the sex/violence theme was connected to a kind of "sex-fear" in the 1990s golden era of erotic thrillers, a fear of feminism and AIDS. Predictably, then, when Kubrick's film directly employed these two terrifying specters, the critical response from audiences was mixed between those who believed the film was a pro-feminist critique (see for example Whitinger and Ingram 2003; Acevedo-Munoz 2002; Alison 2003) and those who thought it was simply misogynistic and exploitative (see for example Decter 1999; Denby 2000; Saur 2001).

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Each Night, Locked in by Triple Bolts, Each Morning, Danced-Out Shoes

When they were asked what they had been doing all night, they always answered that they had been asleep; and, indeed, no noise was ever heard in the room, yet the shoes could not wear themselves out alone!

"The Twelve Dancing Princesses"

Numerous collectors published ATU 306 in a number of variants, so for my purposes, I have assembled an overview of the narrative twists and turns from versions in the Russian, French, and German traditions—as they are reproduced on the SurLaLune Web site.[5] The story goes this way: Once upon a time, a king has several daughters whose dancing slippers appear mysteriously worn out each morning, though—to the best of the father's knowledge—they do not venture outside their bedchambers at night. The confused royal parent offers a reward to whoever can solve the mystery of the danced-out shoes. The hero (Michael, the stargazer, a cowboy) volunteers his service to the king. Unbeknownst to the princesses, Michael follows one night as they sneak down a secret staircase to an underground world. Hidden in a magic cloak of invisibility, the hero watches the princesses arrive at an enchanted castle, where they dance with a collection of male partners until dawn. Before departing, Michael pockets a token from the underground world as proof that he has successfully unraveled the mystery of the princesses' danced-out shoes. He keeps the secret for three days, following the princesses to indulge his voyeurism each night. The youngest princess grows increasingly suspicious and filled with the uncanny sense that someone is stalking, watching, waiting—but her sisters dismiss these anxieties. Eventually Michael presents the pilfered token to the king and his disobedient daughters as irrefutable proof of the midnight adventures and indiscretions and is rewarded with marriage to the princess of his choice—usually the youngest.

5 As N. J. Girardot has commented, critical interpretation of a fairy tale "requires careful consideration of the different variants of a single tale type," and doing so "presents us with many interesting transformations and substitutions" while also identifying "the basic frame of formulaic form, main events, and episodic sequence" of a tale (1977, 279). Here Girardot is borrowing from Alan Dundes (1965). The SurLaLune Web site offers the Grimm text plus seventeen "similar tales across cultures," which I draw upon, and seventeen "modern interpretations" (http://www.surlalunefairytales.com/twelvedancing/index.html).

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Fairy Tales for Adults

And I knew you could see me in the arms of all these men.

Alice Harford, *Eyes Wide Shut*

Eyes Wide Shut is an erotic thriller that may at first seem very distant from the folk stories collected by the Grimm brothers, published in *Childhood and Household Tales,* and selected by Andrew Lang for inclusion in *The Red Fairy Book.* However, not all fairy tales are designed for children. Some are directed at adults, and many have psychological themes, a common one focusing on dilemmas stemming from sexual anxiety and transgressions (Jones 2002, 20). As Steven Swann Jones observes, in tales for adults, the protagonists are usually married and facing moral, emotional, and psychological difficulties associated with their life together—such as anxieties about fidelity, child raising, domestic finances, or communication (Ibid., 25). In fact, according to Jack Zipes, many of the best-known fairy tales are stories that describe how agonizingly complicated or seemingly impossible it is to change or curb natural instincts, including sexual desires (2006b, 131).

Moreover, even the graphic nudity and sexual scenes that threatened to earn Kubrick's film a much-dreaded NC-17 rating are not necessarily out of place in the fairy tale tradition.[6] As many folklorists have noted, anyone encountering the classic versions of tales collected by Perrault or the Grimms will be shocked at the rawness there—sex and violence are key elements of many of them. In well-known stories—ranging from the "Cinderella"/"Donkeyskin" cycle (ATU 510) and "Little Red Riding Hood"/"The Story of Grandmother" (ATU 333) to slightly less famous tales like "Bluebeard" (ATU 312) and "The Juniper Tree" (ATU 720)—scenes of incest, cannibalism, murder (infanticide, parricide, matricide, and intimate femicide), rape, torture, bestiality, and a grab bag of other cultural taboos are commonplace (Tatar 1987).[7] Considering these thematic links among sex, danger, and violence, it does not seem far-fetched to suggest

6 According to the Motion Picture Association of America rating system, a film categorized as NC-17 contains what was previously called X-rated material (graphic violence and pornography). This prohibitive rating limits the media advertising and theatrical distribution of adult-only films.

7 Pauline Greenhill and Anne Brydon discuss a fairy tale film version of "The Juniper Tree" in this volume. As well, Cinderella and the glass slipper are the focus of Ming-Hsun Lin's look at princess figures in the Harry Potter series.

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a generic verisimilitude between a nineteenth-century fairy tale version of "The Twelve Dancing Princesses" and a twenty-first-century Hollywood film such as *Eyes Wide Shut.* The connections go much further, though, when exploring the similarities between these two narratives.

Fidelity Tests

> *Women, don't give in to your sexual curiosity; men, don't permit yourself to be carried away at being sexually betrayed.*
>
> Bruno Bettelheim, 1976 (302)

> *Don't you think one of the charms of marriage is that it makes deception a necessity for both parties?*
>
> Sandor Szavost, *Eyes Wide Shut*

As I have already noted, there are numerous versions of the globe-trotting ATU 306 fairy tale, and many details vary among them. In all versions, the hero must learn the secrets of the danced-out shoes if he wants to pass the central and most obvious suitor test and win the princess prize and a royal wedding. But this motif of a fidelity test plays out differently across versions, with significant variations concerning gender, sexuality, and power. For example, in a French variant (published by Andrew Lang in 1890, according to the SurLaLune Web site), long before the wedding, the loyalty and love of *both* the hero and his soon-to-be-wife—the youngest princess—are tested. Michael proves his devotion to the youngest princess by keeping her secret adventures under wraps for three nights. By delaying his report to the king, however, the hero puts himself at great personal risk because the other princesses realize he knows too much and decide to set a trap and imprison him underground. Luckily, at the last moment, the youngest princess realizes she, too, has fallen in love, and thus intervenes and saves his life—passing a suitor test of her own. This is one of several tales for mature audiences where men and/or women must prove themselves to each other—"East of the Sun and West of the Moon" (ATU 425A) and "Bluebeard" are other obvious examples.

In a Portuguese variant—"The Shoes That Were Danced to Pieces"—the suitor-test motif plays out differently again. Here the princesses fail to demonstrate their worth and marriageability. This is evident when the

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hero—who has accurately solved the mystery of the danced-out shoes and deserves his promised remuneration—instead opts out of the king's offer altogether, refusing to accept the tainted hand of any deviant princess who has danced with devils at a secret underground ball. The idea that females who have expressed their desire for freedom, romance, privacy, and adventure are dangerous and damaged goods is present in many cautionary tales about disobedient women and girls, for example "The Red Shoes" (Hans Christian Andersen) or "Little Red Cap" (ATU 333)—incidentally both these fairy tales have inspired erotic thrillers for the silver screen.[8]

It is clear that both men and women are tested for their fidelity and fitness for marriage in ATU 306. Likewise, it is equally possible for men and women to pass or fail such trials, which are at base tests of commitment, maturity, and trustworthiness. But it is best not to push the theme of sexual equity in fairy tales too far since it is also the case that the naturalness of patriarchal marriage and family structure and its sexual double standard remains unquestioned across versions of ATU 306. For example, in this story, the male hero is rewarded by inheriting the kingdom and the princess for a wife because he is adventurous and cunning. On the flip side—whether the variant is in French, Russian, Portuguese, German, or another language—the princess is punished for stepping out to indulge her feminine *jouissance.* This transgression results in her incarceration in a patriarchal marriage—though in some variants, she, too, falls in love with the hero before betrothal. Either way, however, the youngest princess may or may not desire/admire the hero—before or long after the wedding—but that is of no importance to the king. In the patriarchal home ruled by the law of the father, her fate—like that of her sisters—will be decided in negotiations between men (similar to what Gayle Rubin [1975] describes as "the traffic in women").

8 There are many examples of erotic-thriller fairy tale films. For example, "Little Red Riding Hood" is the back story of the pedophile crime films *Freeway* (directed by Matthew Bright, 1996), starring Reese Witherspoon and Kiefer Sutherland, and *Hard Candy* (directed by David Slade, 2005) (see Greenhill and Kohm, 2009). *The Red Shoes (Bunhongsin)* (directed by Yong-gyun Kim, 2005) also comes to mind as a South Korean folklore, horror, and erotic-thriller crossover film—one that credits Hans Christian Andersen as a writer. In a similar vein, the Japanese cyberpunk film *964 Pinocchio* (directed by Shozin Fukui, 1991) is a cult favorite erotic horror film about the terrible adventures of a lobotomized sex-puppet. Perhaps in its time, Fritz Lang's *Secret Beyond the Door* (1948) was considered an erotic psychological thriller based on the "Bluebeard" tale. For more information on this tale—its versions and interpretations—see Maria Tatar (2004).

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The suitor test and the glimpse into men and women's experiences of patriarchy are key themes from ATU 306 that carry over to *Eyes Wide Shut.* The commitment of both Bill and Alice is tested by their sexual curiosities, tempting them to venture outside the bounds of marriage to satisfy their desires. At the heart of *Eyes Wide Shut* is a romantic contest where appropriate forms of sexual conduct are defined and against which male and female behaviors are measured, endorsed, rewarded, or punished as deemed appropriate (Warner 1994, 135). The audience learns early on that Alice has only imagined her infidelities—and her fantasies are just that—part of a dream story she recounts to Bill in vividly embellished detail. On the other hand, although Bill's attempted adultery is never actually consummated, the viewer watches as he kisses, gropes, grinds upon, and ogles scores of mostly naked and scantily clad women over the course of three days—behavior that, when revealed to Alice, understandably devastates her. Of course that is the intention, in part, of Bill's erotic adventure in vindictiveness—he seeks to punish Alice for her adulterous fantasies by acting out some of his own.

It becomes clear as the film follows Bill through the streets of the city that his self-assurance and marital fidelity are being tested. He is consumed with visions of Alice's dream story—they threaten to overwhelm him. It is his devastating jealousy that motivates Bill to seek out other women with the misguided idea that he can use them to free his mind from the haunting images and fear of losing his wife to another man. Had he listened more carefully to Alice's dream story, he would have learned that it concerned far more important insights into her identity than her fleeting desire, *once upon a time,* to flee with a romantic stranger. Alice recounts her realization that—after confronting and dispelling momentary fantasies of infidelity—she is even more deeply satisfied and committed to her marriage. "At that moment, you were even more dear to me," she confesses. The fact that Alice's story is a tale of successfully completing her own suitor test falls on Bill's deaf ears. Seemingly shocked to learn that women have residual sexual curiosity that is not extinguished by marital vows, a visibly shaken Bill stumbles through the night.

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They Went Down, Down, Down: Midnight Revelry at an Enchanted Mansion

I need a tux, a cloak with a hood, and a mask.

Bill Harford, *Eyes Wide Shut*

Teach me how to become invisible.

Michael, "The Twelve Dancing Princesses"

"The Twelve Dancing Princesses" tells the way one man does the king's bidding through a dangerous underground voyage to a secret ball at an enchanted castle, where the princesses dance with passionate abandon in the arms of handsome masked strangers. In *Eyes Wide Shut,* an unlikely hero similarly searches for a group of legendarily beautiful women—not princesses, but (as it turns out) prostitutes. Wandering through the city, Bill runs into an old friend (Nick Nightingale, played by Todd Field) who tells him about a secret masquerade sex party later that night, and Bill becomes determined to attend it. In the film—as in the fairy tale—duplicity, discretion, and disguise are paramount, so Bill rents a cloak and mask from a costume shop.[9] The invitation-only party takes place at a magnificent mansion, where the *mise en scène* is gothic ritual as a collection of women—naked except for masks, thongs, and stilettos—wander through enormous, cavernous, candlelit rooms, engaging in exhibitionist sex acts as they are exchanged and shared among masked male guests. Bill stands on the side-

9 The motifs of disguise and an elegant ball also appear in a considerably more famous fairy tale, one where the protagonist passes as an insider to attend a dance at a majestic castle—namely "Cinderella" (ATU 510A). In it the lowly and persecuted heroine risks all to experience the magic of a royal fete and a waltz with the prince of her dreams. Like Michael the gardener, Cinderella's charm and beauty win her the favor of a royal suitor, and an unlikely marriage ensues between a common servant and a member of the elite—such that some variants of the story are classified as ATU 510B: "unnatural love" tales. In some variants of ATU 510, the heroine also descends from royal bloodlines but is thrown into temporary servitude because of unusually cruel, wicked, or deviant (step)parents, as in "Donkeyskin" or "All-Kinds-of-Fur," whose eponymous heroine is subject to the incestuous wishes of her father. In these tales, marriage returns the heroine to her original social class and elevates her status (from child to married woman and/or, in some cases, from exiled princess to queen). Conversely, it is clear that marriage is a ride up the class elevator for the lowly cowboy in the story "The Danced-Out Shoes."

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lines, invisible in his cloak,[10] as he watches the scene, presumably with eyes very much wide open.

The potent mix of pleasure and danger that draws Bill to the intriguing underground event intensifies when he witnesses the display of absolute male dominance and female submission. Like Michael, Bill is "quite bewildered at the magnificence of the sight" (Lang 1890). Inadvertently both Michael and Bill become completely entangled in the mysterious midnight revelry they witness from the safety of their respective invisible perches. In the process of investigating the strange and wonderful happenings underground at the secret ball, each hero is progressively entranced by the sight of the extraordinary and exotic women performing with such exuberance and abandon. In dancing slippers or stilettos, as it were, the women form a powerful spectacle for the male voyeurs to consume hungrily. And yet, the more they look, the more famished each man becomes. In both film and fairy tale, the male investigators risk detection to return to the scene of the late-night carousing for a second look, and in the case of "The Twelve Dancing Princesses," Michael returns not once, but twice, to indulge in voyeurism and wonder at the sight of the lovely princesses three nights in a row. Surely these fabulous females ooze what feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey (1975) described as to-be-looked-at-ness. Of course, by extension, both the princesses and the prostitutes serve as the *femmes fatale*, a phallic female whom men desire, fear, and cannot resist, even when that longing places them in precarious positions and dangerous territories.

The burning desire to consume, possess, or otherwise intimately bond with these fantastic (and potentially fatal) women motivates both Michael and Bill to take enormous personal risks—indeed, they flirt with death to gain closer access. As Mary Anne Doane (1991) could have told these unlucky fellows (had they asked), their efforts are doomed to failure: the *femme fatale* is, at base, ultimately and exquisitely unknowable. Part of what makes the lovely, vivacious, undomesticated, and sexually expressive women in *Eyes Wide Shut* and "The Twelve Dancing Princesses" so irresistibly

10 Although Bill is suitably concealed at the orgy—as was Michael at the ball—both men misstep and inadvertently alert others to their trespassing. In "The Twelve Dancing Princesses," Michael carelessly treads on the princess's dress while in *Eyes Wide Shut,* Bill neglects to cover his tracks, leaving a trail of clues that signal he is not an elite club member (the taxi waiting at the gate, the receipt in his pocket from the rental shop) but, rather, an intruder. In each case, these mistakes are significant because they may very well cost the hero his life—if it is not for the woman who intervenes and saves him.

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intriguing is that they remain enigmatic to the male voyeur. The spectacle of their magnificent womanliness is a masquerade, Doane explains, borrowing from Joan Riviere (1929)—a performance enacting the only source of power allowed to women under patriarchy: sex appeal.

The power of seduction wielded by beautiful women is not sufficient, however, to prevent them from being abused and controlled by the same men who exhibit intense fascination. At the orgy, the prostitutes' performance of masked hypersexuality makes the women anonymous and interchangeable objects for male pleasure—a ritualistic exaggeration of women's everyday lot under patriarchy.[11] This is a truism that Alice Harford knows and resists with futility when she confronts her husband about the normalization of women's sexual objectification at the hands of men. It is her rage at this status quo that drives her husband away and sets in motion the chain of events that culminates in his presence at the mansion. A self-fulfilling prophesy if there ever was one, Alice's outburst of frustration with everyday sexism and misogyny inspires her husband's encounters with a series of prostitutes later that same night. Yet even after indulging himself, Bill moves no closer to understanding the nature of female desire, women's lot under patriarchy, or the true social function of marriage—all things that Alice, the prostitutes, and the disobedient dancing princesses undoubtedly know deeply and intimately with every breath they take.

From Voyeurism to Violence

I don't think you realize the danger you're in now.
You can't fool them for much longer.

Masked Woman, *Eyes Wide Shut*

The enchanted castle has no more secrets for you.

Youngest Princess, "The Twelve Dancing Princesses"

In both the fairy tale and film, the fantastic/fantasy women out of bounds pose at least a mild threat to the patriarchal cultural order of things in general and the male ego in particular. The women must be placed under absolute male control—their headstrong desire subdued, their passionate

11 This insight belongs to Charles Helmetag's critical review of Kubrick's film, where the prostitutes are described as anonymous and interchangeable (2003, 280).

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energy harnessed and safely contained by husbands, fathers, and other powerful men.[12] In the case of "The Twelve Dancing Princesses," it is (in the first instance) a father who tries to assert his paternal dominance by taming his daughters' forbidden adventures. In the second instance, the hero/husband systemically tracks and tames his lovely princess prize. In *Eyes Wide Shut,* it is (in the first instance) a husband who tries to boost his male ego through sexual conquests with anonymous women. In the second instance, the brotherhood of men organize and attend members-only group sex parties and are responsible for the deaths of one or more of the unfortunate prostitutes who unsuccessfully attempt to break the rules and pay with their lives. In both the fairy tale and the film, male ownership of women is a prominent theme.

Likewise, in both narratives, men act instinctively, defensively, even violently in response to the threat of female sexual agency. And for their part, the women express no remorse for their wild behavior. It should come as no surprise, then, that in the erotic thriller, several promiscuous women lose their lives while the randy (and married) men escape relatively unscathed from their sexual escapades. Of course, in fairy tales—as in life—the stakes are very different for men and women where sexual transgression is concerned. As many feminist folklorists have observed, in fairy tales, no penalty is too harsh for women who dare to overstep their bounds. Having said that, it is important to note that this film and its fairy tale predecessor both include instances where males and females are perpetrators as well as victims of violence. From the enchanted princes trapped underground and the attempted murder of Michael at the secret ball in "The Twelve Dancing Princesses," to the bruises on Nick Nightingale and stalking, gay baiting/bashing, and death threats against Bill in Kubrick's film—it is clear that weaker men, too, are at risk in a patriarchal social system.

12 Nancy Tuana (1993) explains the philosophical arguments for, and historical conditions of, keeping women under man's control to preserve patriarchal order in culture, science, and religion.

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Characterization and Redemption

I am ready to redeem him.

Masked Woman, *Eyes Wide Shut*

Don't drink!

Youngest Princess, "The Twelve Dancing Princesses"

As mentioned earlier, in both the fairy tale and the film, once the hero is discovered and identified as a trespasser at the ball or party, he is in grave danger. In both instances, he is saved by a woman who, in the process, sacrifices herself or her freedom. For the youngest princess in ATU 306, her choice to intervene and rescue Michael is motivated by her love for him and leads directly to their marriage. In some versions of the tale, her act initiates a string of events that ends with all of her sisters married to disenchanted princes set free from the underground ball—a massively happy ending for all concerned. Things are considerably darker and more tragic in the film—when Bill learns that the woman who tried to warn and save him turns up dead at the morgue the next day. Despite these differences, however, it is highly significant that the theme is the same: men are saved by the selfless love of a good woman.

This take-home message is a thematic staple of fairy tales such as "Six Swans" (ATU 450), Hans Christian Andersen's "The Little Mermaid," "Beauty and the Beast" (ATU 425C) and other search for the lost husband (ATU 425) and animal bridegroom (ATU 425A) tales. *Eyes Wide Shut* gives the viewer what appears to be a double dose of this fairy tale theme: the selfless prostitute saves Bill from the wrath of the orgy participants, and later his selfless wife, Alice, recommits to their marriage, rescuing Bill from his torment of jealousy and guilt. One female rescuer dies alone, the other lives on, cocooned in upscale domesticity. Why the disparity between the fates allotted to different types of women? The answer to this question becomes clearer with more reflection on the fairy tale. Especially in the Russian version of "The Secret Ball" (another variant of ATU 306), where the princesses who danced with devils are rejected by the hero as unsuitably tainted (as they are in the Portuguese version discussed above), there is evidence of the seemingly timeless sexual double standard and remarkably resilient

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Madonna/whore dichotomy characteristic of this tale type, more or less intact from the Grimms to Kubrick.[13]

To be fair, all of the characters in *Eyes Wide Shut* are types: doctors and piano players, wives and mothers, pushy powerful patriarchs (like Victor Ziegler/Sydney Pollack and Sandor Szavost/Sky Dumont) and thugs, models, and prostitutes. This convention echoes fairy tales, where all the characters are types and almost invariably fall into two general categories: good or bad. Fairy tale characters are rarely ambiguous, lack psychological depth, and are relatively undeveloped. This makes the moral lessons unmistakable: the bad are punished, the good are rewarded, the lovely princess lives happily ever after, and the evil stepmother dies a terrible death. Consuming fairy tales from childhood to adulthood enables audiences to recognize these predictable tropes. However, in this instance, what works for the heavy-handed moralistic tales of children's literature does not necessarily suit adult cinematic folklore.[14]

When *Eyes Wide Shut* used character types, or caricatures, and generic simplifications common to the fairy tale to develop a deeply disturbing psychological and erotic thriller, reviewers were hugely disappointed and criticized Kubrick for his wooden characters and their lack of intensity or chemistry (Mattessich 2000; Blake 1999). They also slammed the film for what they described as its simplistic characters lacking believable personas and the actors' wooden delivery of (what sounded like) awkwardly stilted and highly staged dialogue.[15] However, looked at through the lens of fairy tale cinema, perhaps these formulaic elements make more sense. By condensing the characters into simplistic types, Kubrick creates a highly charged thriller of moral confrontation involving the pleasures and perils of sex that sharply distinguishes villain from hero(ine) (Williams 2005, 32). The result is a clear take-home message, which David Andrews elegantly distilled as *it's dangerous not to satisfy your spouse* (2006, 65).

It is not only fairy tales that contain standard character types. In other Hollywood genres, there are iconic stock characters and classic narrative strands specific to horror, sci-fi, and comedy films. Correspondingly, then,

13 For a discussion of Freud's Madonna/whore dichotomy and its implications, see Joyce McDougall (2004).

14 Kim Snowden's discussion of her students' difficulties with film and prose versions of Angela Carter's fairy tale revisions in this volume poses similar interpretive issues.

15 Similar criticisms were leveled at Nietzchka Keene's *The Juniper Tree,* as discussed by Pauline Greenhill and Anne Brydon in this collection.

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in her study of erotic thrillers, Linda Williams (2005) describes the predictable triangulation of a bored and neglected wife; a lousy, guilty, and paranoid husband; and a generally disposable, highly sexed, and loose woman or *femmes fatale*. This configuration not only delivers sexual intrigue and dramatic tension but also supplies a recognizable cast of character types viewers expect in erotic thrillers. Kubrick followed this generic convention exactly, which might have been the problem—since his reputation as an award-winning filmmaker had raised audience expectations for cinematic innovation in his work. Moreover, it is also true that the complexity of characterization in award-winning erotic thrillers of the 1980s and 1990s—such as Alex Forrest (Glenn Close) in *Fatal Attraction* (directed by Adrian Lyne, 1987) and Catherine Tramell (Sharon Stone) and Nick Curran (Michael Douglas) in *Basic Instinct* (directed by Paul Verhoeven, 1992)—had set the bar very high for Kubrick's long-awaited contribution to the genre.

Transformation and Initiation

> *From a broader point of view it is what Max Luthi calls a story that is concerned with the process of human maturation, a tale that depicts some essential threatening transitional episode in personal growth and socialization.*
>
> N. J. Girardot, 1977 (280)

> *As soon as you were gone, it was completely different. I felt wonderful.*
>
> Alice Harford, *Eyes Wide Shut*

As Marie-Louise von Franz has noted, even fairy tales with titles featuring women, or stories that appear to be centrally concerned with a female character, are often about men and the development of their emotional maturity (1972, 2). Von Franz observes that fairy tales are usually transcribed or authored by men (though told by women in the oral tradition), and as a result, the representations of women reflect male fantasies of womanliness—or what Jungians call *the anima.*[16] Perhaps the best example of this transformation of women into sexual stereotypes occurs in Kubrick's

16 Of course, collection and redaction are by no means as simply gendered as this generalization suggests. Both Nina Auerbach and U. C. Knoepflmacher (1992) and Elizabeth Wanning Harries (2001) have extensively discussed women writers' fairy tale creations.

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ritualistic orgy scene, where one reviewer described the masked prostitutes as "not so much real women as abstract projections of someone else's sexual desire" (Rasmussen 2001, 347).

Von Franz continues, "A feminine figure in a fairy tale with the whole story circling around it does not necessarily prove that the tale has to do with a woman's psychology. Many long stories of the sufferings of a woman have been written by men and are the projection of their anima problem" (1972, 2). The story of "The Twelve Dancing Princesses" is a case in point. It tells of two men (a father and a suitor) who join forces to restrain and rule over some willful young women. Although ATU 306 is explicitly about a dozen princesses and their slippers, it is really, of course, about the perceived threat that powerful and self-actualized women pose to patriarchal masculinities. Fast-forward a few centuries, and the story is modernized in a film about a different set of men seeking control over another group of naughty and fascinating females (some of whom are hired for sex and others who marry for sex—or so the smarmy Hungarian Sandor Szavost explains to Alice on the dance floor). In each case, the women are mere props—eye candy—whose main function is to operate as a catalyst in a story about a man's initiation into psychosexual maturity.

In fact, a common quest pattern culminating in initiation in fairy tales involves a separation (a call to adventure, a threshold crossing into an otherworldly realm), an initiation (a ritual or test, resulting in a behavioral transformation), and the hero's return (a reincorporation into society) (Jones 2002, 15). N. J. Girardot describes the importance of this pairing of quest and initiation in greater detail in fairy tales whose plots unfold from an initial prologue and problem, to a separation, through a liminal period, and then culminate in a reincorporation and epilogue—likely a happily-ever-after resolution (1977, 282). "The Twelve Dancing Princesses" follows this format exactly: a cowboy becomes a self-directed young adolescent on a mission, eventually maturing into a married man who will be king.

Eyes Wide Shut, too, follows this structure as Bill is initiated into the reality of his marriage through a journey of self-awakening. His nighttime expedition into the sexual underside of New York City is a crucial liminal and transitory experience that involves chaotic "ordeals of a physical and psychological nature" suffered by the hero in isolation from the community or family (Girardot 1977, 282). These kinds of transitions are required when the hero lacks cultural knowledge and suffers from an abundance of innocence, naïveté, or ignorance about the world, or an extreme case of

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disavowal—a situation that reflects exactly Bill's eyes-wide-shut approach to life, love, and human nature.[17] Girardot describes this liminal phase as "a necessary prelude to any new creation or transition in life" (Ibid., 282). Progressing from taunts of homosexuality, to the threshold of adultery, to a ritualistic orgy complete with suggestions of human sacrifice, a traumatized Bill finally makes it back to the safety of the marital bed. It is only after he survives these ordeals and tests that he is ready to participate fully in rebuilding his relationship with Alice—rather than continuing to coast through it, alternately neglecting and misunderstanding his wife.

Accustomed to seeing the world and others through a dispassionate and detached clinical perspective, Bill now has his eyes opened wide to the power and danger of sexuality—his own desire, Alice's, and that of a cast of threatening strangers (men and women) lurking outside the safe harbor of his marriage. The initiation function is coupled with a cautionary warning about the dark dangers that exist in the unknown world beyond the boundaries of marriage/family/home. This same message is directed to curious girls and young women through "Little Red Riding Hood" and Bluebeard's wife because the two tales that feature them (or at least the best-known versions) also warn about the threats to personal safety that can result from venturing into unknown and forbidden territories, woods, or chambers.[18] In "The Twelve Dancing Princesses" and *Eyes Wide Shut,* warnings are issued to both men and women prohibiting the breaching of boundaries and breaking of social taboos that may threaten the functioning of both the individual and social bodies. By describing the plights of ineffective fathers with disobedient daughters running wild and dysfunctional families with neglected wives and philandering husbands, fairy tales

17 According to Beatriz E. Dujovne (2004), *disavowal* involves the failure to grasp fully the meaning of what is perceived; it is a psychological defense that deflects ideas that may endanger our views of the world and the self as we know them. Dujovne develops an analysis of Bill's extreme disavowal, denial, and neuroses that accounts for the crisis of masculinity in the film.

18 In the French text of "Little Red Riding Hood," published by Charles Perrault in 1697 (http://www.surlalunefairytales.com/authors/perrault.html), the appended moral makes the warning explicit but only alludes to sexuality: "Children, especially attractive, well bred young ladies, should never talk to strangers, for if they should do so, they may well provide dinner for a wolf. I say 'wolf,' but there are various kinds of wolves. There are also those who are charming, quiet, polite, unassuming, complacent, and sweet, who pursue young women at home and in the streets. And unfortunately, it is these gentle wolves who are the most dangerous ones of all" (http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0333.html; see also Warner 1990).

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operate as cultural pedagogy, clearly demarcating cultural values, describing appropriate rewards and punishments, and defining heroism and what counts as happiness.

No Dream Is Ever Just a Dream: Cinematic Folklore as Cultural Analysis

> *The effectiveness of fairy tales and other forms of fantastic literature depends on the innovative manner in which we make the basic information of the tales relevant for the listeners and receivers of the tales. As our environment changes and evolves, so too do we change the media or modes of the tales to enable us to adapt to new conditions.*
>
> Jack Zipes, 2006b (152)

Kubrick's film is a modern, gothic, fairy tale film for adults that successfully incorporates the classic narrative structure of "The Twelve Dancing Princesses" and many of its motifs, reshaping them to tell a modernized, yet timeless, story. Though probably unintentionally and perhaps unconsciously, Kubrick's erotic thriller unfolds as "an age-old folk narrative decked out in the most up-to-the-minute guise" (Schechter 1988, 15). This film offers "a centuries-old story retold in terms that are consonant with the obsessions of our age,"—namely the preoccupied fascinations with sex, secrets, and power (Ibid., 23). Both "The Twelve Dancing Princesses" and *Eyes Wide Shut* are cautionary tales that develop the themes of the duplicity of women, masculinity in crisis, the irresistibility of pleasure infused with danger, and the difficulties of marital fidelity.

At the same time that Kubrick reveals the underside of domesticity and marriage among the elite, his film manages to reposition these social institutions as fixtures. In the film, as in the fairy tale, domesticity operates as cultural scaffolding, however flawed and dysfunctional for both genders. It provides support and a foothold in ever-changing times, and it is a control mechanism for the sexuality of both genders. It is then no surprise that both stories end with the image of marriage as panacea—although to be fair, *Eyes Wide Shut* does not present an unequivocally happy ending. This may at first appear to be a significant departure from fairy tale convention, but as Lutz Röhrich notes, it is an oversimplification to suggest that every fairy tale ends happily; instead, many stories have mildly unsettling and partial resolutions—with many questions left unanswered and loose strings dangling

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(1991: 209). Certainly this describes the state of affairs between Bill and Alice as the lights come up.

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